

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:25 p.m. at the Department of Veterans Affairs. In his remarks, he referred to Garnett G. Shropshire, World War II veteran, who introduced the President, and Hugo Mendoza, Persian Gulf war veteran.

Remarks on North Korea and an Exchange With Reporters

June 22, 1994

The President. Good afternoon. Today I want to announce an important step forward in the situation in North Korea. This afternoon we have received formal confirmation from North Korea that it will freeze the major elements of its nuclear program while a new round of talks between our nations proceeds.

In response, we are informing the North Koreans that we are ready to go forward with a new round of talks in Geneva early next month. North Korea has assured us that while we go forward with these talks it will not reload its five-megawatt reactor with new fuel or reprocess spent fuel. We have also been assured that the IAEA will be allowed to keep its inspectors and monitoring equipment in place at the Yongbyon nuclear facility, thus allowing verification of North Korea's agreement. We welcome this very positive development which restores the basis for talks between North Korea and the United States.

In addition to addressing the nuclear issue, we are prepared to discuss the full range of security, political, and economic issues that affects North Korea's relationship with the international community. During these discussions we will suspend our efforts to pursue a sanctions resolution in the United Nations Security Council. We also welcome the agreement between South Korea and North Korea to pursue a meeting between their Presidents.

I would like to thank President Carter for the important role he played in helping to achieve this step. These developments mark not a solution to the problem, but they do mark a new opportunity to find a solution. It is the beginning of a new stage in our efforts to pursue a nonnuclear Korean Peninsula. We hope this will lead to the resolution

of all the issues that divide Korea from the international community.

In close consultation with our allies, we will continue as we have over the past year and more to pursue our interests and our goals with steadiness, realism, and resolve. This approach is paying off, and we will continue it. This is good news. Our task now is to transform this news into a lasting agreement.

Q. Mr. President, are you going to try to insist on finding out whether or not they have already built a bomb and getting the facts on any past violations as part of these talks?

The President. Well, let me say that, first of all, we have been in touch with the North Koreans in New York almost at this moment. We will set up these talks, and we will have ample opportunity to discuss the range of issues that will be discussed in the talks. And we expect to discuss, obviously, all the issues that have divided us.

Yes, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Q. Mr. President, what concessions did we make to bring this about? And why is it that you did not meet with President Carter face to face? Here's a man who actually met Kim Il-song, one of the few—our profiles may not jive and so forth. You would have had a great chance to debrief him, and instead, you talked to him on the telephone.

The President. We talked to him for a long time on the telephone. The only reason we didn't is because I didn't want to ask him to come all the way up to Camp David, and we had planned to go up there for the weekend. And he decided and I decided there was—we know each other very well; we've known each other for 20 years—we decided we didn't need to do it; we could just have a long talk on the phone, and that's what we did.

Q. Did we make any concessions——

The President. No.

Q. ——to the North Koreans to bring this about?

The President. No. The only thing that we said was that we would suspend our efforts to pursue sanctions if there was a verifiable freeze on the nuclear program while the talks continued, which included no refueling of the reactor and no reprocessing.

When President Carter came back he said—this was the cautionary note, you know, I raised in Chicago last Friday when I was asked to comment on this statement—he said that he believed that Kim Il-song had made that statement to him. We said that we would wait for official confirmation. We received it today. That confirmation gives us the basis for resuming the talks.

Yes, Rita [Rita Braver, CBS News].

Q. President Clinton, some of your aides are saying, “We got everything we want here.” Is this one of those cases where the other guy blinked?

The President. I don’t think it’s useful for me to characterize it in that way. We know what the facts are. If you look at what we’ve done over the last year and a half, we have followed basically a two-pronged policy. We have worked as hard as we could to be firm, to be resolute, to bring our allies closer and closer together. And when I say our allies on this issue, I consider not just South Korea and Japan but Russia and China to be our allies. All of us have the same interests and the same desires.

We also always kept the door open. I always said I did not seek a confrontation, I sought to give North Korea a way to become a part of the international community.

When President Carter was invited and expressed a willingness to go to North Korea, I thought it gave us one opportunity that we would not otherwise have with a private citizen, but a distinguished American private citizen, to communicate the position of our administration and to do it—the very fact that he went, I think, was a gesture of the importance that we placed on resolving this matter and not just for ourselves but for the world.

And so I think that we know what the facts are. We know we pursued a firm course. We know that President Carter went and made a very persuasive case, and we know what the North Koreans did. I don’t think it’s useful to characterize this in terms of winners and losers. I think the world will be the winner if we can resolve this. But we’ve not done it yet.

Brit [Brit Hume, ABC News].

Q. Mr. President, it would appear that President Carter may have either seen something that perhaps you and others may not

have seen as clearly as he did, or that perhaps this was a more closely coordinated effort between you and Mr. Carter than it may have appeared at the time. Is either of those things correct?

The President. Well, I don’t know that I would characterize it in that way. He called me; we talked about it. I wanted to make sure he had adequate briefings. I have always—I have, as you probably know, I have—and I’ve said this I believe publicly—I have sought other means of personally communicating to Kim Il-song that the desires of the United States and the interests of the United States and the policy of the United States was to pursue a nonnuclear Korean Peninsula and to give North Korea a way of moving with dignity into the international community and away from an isolated path, which we found quite disturbing for all the reasons that I’ve already said.

It seemed to me that when President Carter expressed a willingness to go and they had given him an invitation of some longstanding to come, that that gave us the opportunity to give North Korea a direct message to their leader from a distinguished American citizen, without in any way undermining the necessary and correct government-to-government contacts that we had going on at other levels.

President Carter, I think, was very faithful in articulating the policy of our Government. And I think that that provided a forum in which the North Korean leader, Kim Il-song, could respond as he did. And I’m very pleased about it.

When we were called last Thursday and this whole issue was discussed and we said what we said about we hope that their message meant that they were willing to freeze their nuclear program, then they said they were. Then we got formal confirmation today of the definition of freeze. Their definition was the same as ours. We had the basis to go forward. I’m very happy about it.

Yes, Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, CNN]. Go ahead.

Q. There will be critics, as you well know, who will argue that once again the North Koreans have succeeded in stalling, and clandestinely, this will give them an opportunity while their negotiators talk to U.S. negotiators in Geneva to pursue their nuclear am-

bitions, which they're not about to give up. How do you verify that they are sincere in this effort?

The President. Well, that was a big part of the statement, of course, of the letter that we got, not just that there would be an agreement to freeze the program but that the agreement be verifiable. The IAEA inspectors and the monitoring equipment on the ground can be and will be used to verify the commitment not to reprocess and not to re-fuel.

If we didn't have some way of verifying it, you and I wouldn't be having this conversation at this moment.

Yes, one last question.

Q. Mr. President, could you tell us, beyond just the focus of the talks, could you tell us what your longer range view is? Do you see the Koreans being reunified? What do you see happening, coming out of all this?

The President. Well, I think, first of all, that is a decision for the peoples and their leaders in South and North Korea to resolve. What the United States wants is for the agreement that the Koreans made in 1991 to make the Peninsula nonnuclear to be carried through.

The United States wants the NPT to be a success with regard to North Korea. The United States wants North Korea, in whatever relationship it pursues with South Korea—that is up to them—to move toward becoming an integral and responsible member of the international community. That will auger well for the peace and prosperity of the peoples of north Asia as well as for the security interest of the United States. That is what we have pursued with great diligence, and I'm very hopeful that these talks will bring us closer to that.

As I said, this does not solve the problem, but it certainly gives us the basis for seeking a solution. And I'm quite pleased.

Thank you very much.

Q. Have you called Jimmy Carter?

The President. Oh, I have. I called him, talked to him about the letter. We had a very good talk, told him again I was glad he went, and I thought it was a trip worth taking, a risk worth taking, and I was very pleased.

Q. You didn't mind his criticism of your sanctions policy? He was pretty blunt, wasn't he?

The President. No. No, as long as the agreement—like I said, we've been friends a long time. The agreement was that he would faithfully communicate our position. I am absolutely convinced he did it, and I'm absolutely convinced now that they have met the agreement. And I feel good about it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:34 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Statement on the White House Conference on Africa

June 22, 1994

The challenges facing Africa and American policy towards the continent will draw on the participation and combined efforts of all Americans. This meeting is an important opportunity for leaders who care deeply about Africa to share ideas and experiences.

NOTE: This statement was part of a statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the White House will host a Conference on Africa on June 26 and 27.

Nomination for a United States Court of Appeals Judge

June 22, 1994

The President today nominated William C. Bryson to serve on the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

"I am pleased to nominate William Bryson, who has devoted his career to serving the public," the President said today. "He will bring a wealth of experience from the Justice Department to the Federal bench, and the American people will continue to enjoy the great benefits of his legal talent and personal dedication."

NOTE: A biography of the nominee was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.